

## BOOK REVIEWS

*The Ambivalent American Jew* — Politics, Religion, and Family in American Jewish Life, by CHARLES S. LIEBMAN (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1973).

*Reviewed by* Simcha Krauss

Dr. Charles Liebman, associate professor and Chairman of the Department of Political Studies at Bar Ilan University, has written an admirable and well documented book on the nature of the American Jew. His thesis, briefly stated, is that there are two opposite poles, two sets of values which the American Jew must choose: that of integration or that of survival. And according to Dr. Liebman these conflicting values "tear the American Jew asunder." Indeed, as he argues, the integrationist impulse, specifically in the current, modern milieu where integration leads to an unbridled, unchecked cosmopolitanism and universalism, can result in the final rejection of Judaism itself.

In structuring his thesis, and in amassing sociological data, Liebman has done a brilliant job. The first section traces the growth of American Judaism from its Euro-

pean roots to the present and relates how the integration-survival issue led to a redefinition of Jewish "religious" behavior.

The second part focuses on two points. First, the author describes and discusses various social segments of the community, such as the radical college youth and the rabbinate, and how they affect the integration-survival problem. Secondly, he analyzes the political liberalism of the Jewish community. Liebman sees the American Jewish community's liberalism as an effort to restructure the political environment so as to minimize the integration-survival tension in America and thus make integration easier.

This point may be argued but I think the opposite is true; i.e., the Jewish community's liberalism will make survival easier. Cannot one argue that to the extent that political liberalism fought for such civil rights and civil liberties for minorities it became possible for various segments of society to dif-

fer, and yet to maintain a legitimate place *inside* the system? To the extent that political liberalism was successful, it was the vehicle by which a "survivalist" position would rear its head, claim its rightful position without need for apologies. For in a pluralistic society almost any position, even if it is as "survivalist" as Squaretown, has the right to exist, to operate, and to flourish.

There exists in the American Jewish community, and particularly in the Orthodox Jewish community, a visceral reaction, a kind of backlash against political liberalism as we have known. Liebman himself discusses this phenomenon and tends to confirm and to sympathize with this position. And we do know that in the last election (1972), national and local, Jews as a group tended to vote for conservative candidates in larger numbers than ever before. What prompted this switch is quite well known and need not be discussed within the framework of this review. I do want to argue, however, that this total abandonment and rejection of political liberalism by a large number of American Jews is quite unfortunate and may even be tragic. Writing after the *Milchemet Yom Hadin* on this issue carries its own risk. After all, former President Nixon was not "neutral in his thought, deed and action" when the chips were down. For this, indeed, American Jews ought to show their appreciation and gratitude in all manners possible.

It does not follow logically, however, that the particular ideological

or political stance of the president (his political conservatism), led to his acting the way he did. Had American interests dictated this kind of action, and I believe that they did, a president with a more liberal political stance would have acted in the same decisive manner. And though making predictions is a hazardous affair. I believe that if American state interests were to dictate a different course of action even President Nixon would not have hesitated to reverse his course. Not to put one's trust in princes is good Jewish doctrine, if I remember *Tehilim* correctly.

The point I am making is becoming clearer everyday. It is dangerous as a policy, and it is even more dangerous when we elevate this trust into an "ought" whereby we are told that the *Yeshua* will come if only we reject liberalism and ally ourselves with the conservatives in the country. Alliance with conservatives after Watergate? Trusting the perpetrators of Watergate with the security of Israel?

I am not being pessimistic. But I strongly feel that we ought to be realistic, analytic and sophisticated in evaluating what happened in the difficult period beginning with the Yom Kippur War. To say that what saved us was political conservatism is utter folly.

Let us ask ourselves the following hypothetical question: If a current problem such as the recent energy crisis will lead to a resurgence of anti-Semitism in this country, where will this new anti-Semitism find its historical base and where will its leadership come

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from: the liberal or the conservative community?

I admit that generalizations are dangerous. But historically it was from the right, and from the conservative right wing that anti-Semitism found its ideological justification, its social base, and its leadership.

Another point in Liebman's thesis that needs clarification is Liebman's conclusion that to the extent that the "integrationist" side gains the upper hand, the survival of American Jewry is in danger, or to put it in Liebman's terms, "meaningful Jewish survival" is in danger. This thesis, or rather the problem that he posits in this thesis, is not a new problem, however. It is not a new tension in Judaism and certainly not a tension restricted to the American Jew. It is a problem concerning any and all Jews living in open, culturally pluralistic societies. Indeed, it is a problem facing the Jew in Israel, facing Israeli society itself to the extent that, in its rationally articulate purpose, it identifies with universal, Western, libertarian and laic goals rather than with a particular religious, theocentric goal and orientation.

Liebman states, at the end, a personal observation:

Judaism, as I understand it, is threatened by contemporary currents in American life. Fewer and fewer areas today are even neutral to Jewish values. Literature, theatre, art, scholarship, politics — all seem to undermine what I consider to be the essentials of Judaism. More than ever before, the values of integration and survival are mutually contradictory. At

least until we enter a postmodern world, it seems to me that Jewish survival requires turning against the integrationist response.

Let us assume that the statement is correct. Is it a comment on American Jewish life in general? Don't the same trends exist in the theater, arts, etc., in Israel? If they exist, and I believe they do, then the issue discussed by Liebman in terms of the "ambivalence" of the "American Jew" is discussed from too narrow a perspective. For the issue discussed by Liebman is in essence an issue which is as old as Judaism itself.

Modern Jewish history amply demonstrates this point. Did not Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch make an effort to live with this tension, and find a proper balance without choosing one over the other? And, closer to our time, did not Rav Kuk wrestle with this tension? As a matter of fact, the American *yeshivot*, with which Dr. Liebman is so well acquainted and on which he wrote with such perception, are living and coping with this tension, and very often quite successfully.

A study of Orthodox Jewry, whether in America or in Israel will bear out my contention that the integration-survival tension, the very "ambivalence" reviewed by Liebman, is not limited to the American Jew.

What are some of the issues on which Orthodoxy, both here and in Israel, is divided?

Let us take but two "live" issues: The attitude to secular education vis-a-vis the non-Orthodox. On both these issues the so called survivalist, to use Liebman's term,

will be against giving secular studies any legitimacy and he will be against establishing closer institutional ties with the non-Orthodox. The integrationist will espouse more positive attitudes to secular studies, even to the point of granting it legitimacy, and will encourage a working relationship with the non-Orthodox.

Now the pros and cons of these positions may be argued from many vantage points. Liebman chooses to argue in terms of integration vs. survival. And here I believe he is mistaken.

In truth what Liebman calls the "integration-survival tension" is also known as the universal vs. particular tension in Judaism. In essence both aspects are important, both poles are within the Jewish tradition. Their relationship to each other, when to stress one over the other depends on the particular historical period and on the specific social milieu in which one lives. It does not follow logically, however, that one must at any time make a definitive choice or, as a matter of fact, that the American Jew circa 1974 must make that choice.

The Jew—whether American, Israeli, or French—must exist with this tension, come to grips with it, and live with it. It is part of the generally Jewish burden, the "yoke" of Judaism, if you wish. It is exactly, to use a Hirschinian term, Jewish to be a *Yisroel-Mentsch* and this *Yisroel-Mentschkeit* entails incorporating in one's system, internalizing in one's life, both the integrationist as well as the survivalist dimensions. The danger lies in choosing one and neglecting the other, a course Liebman seems to advocate.

While the choice of survival over integration may be justified and defended during particular periods of Jewish history, this decision does not depend on the sociological conditions of a particular segment of Jewry alone, as Liebman argues. It must be argued on a much broader canvass, one that encompasses a detailed analysis of the whole corpus of Jewish history, Jewish philosophy, and, needless to say, the Halakhah—an area which Liebman, in an otherwise excellent sociological study, fails to discuss at all.

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*Studies in Judaica in Honor of Dr. Samuel Belkin as Scholar and Educator*, edited by LEON D. STITSKIN (New York: Ktav Publishing House and Yeshiva University Press, 1974).

*Reviewed by* Fred Rosner

This volume is an anthology dedicated to the commemoration of Dr. Belkin's thirtieth anniversary as President of Yeshiva University. With one exception, the

anthology contains numerous scholarly essays previously published by Yeshiva University Press and *TRADITION*. The only chapter not previously published is Dr. Stitskin's essay in which he describes Dr. Belkin as a scholar and

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educator. Dr. Stitskin, Professor of Jewish Philosophy, enumerates and analyzes Belkin's scholarly writings on Philo, and his unique approach to the study of Talmud and Halakhah as exemplified by the following excerpt from his book *In His Image* (Abelard-Schuman 1961 p. 214): "Jewish law which has its origin and is deeply rooted in religious convictions, looks upon law as a moral guide and as a means of learning how to obey the Divine word of God."

Stitskin then turns to Belkin the educator and lists his three guiding educational principles.

1. the centrality of Torah learning and practice; and
2. The advancement of the arts and sciences and their infusion with our spiritual heritage; and
3. service to the nation and the Jewish community by professional alumni and trained leaders imbued with skills, ethics and spiritual vision.

Dr. Belkin's accomplishments as one of this nation's foremost educators is attested to by more than 8,000 graduates of the colleges, graduate and professional schools that make up Yeshiva University who are serving in communal and religious leadership, industry, medicine, government, law, the sciences, social service and education.

Dr. Belkin emphasizes the synthesis of Torah Judaism and our environment, the synthesis of *Torah-Umadah*, the synthesis of Torah and secular knowledge, the synthesis of religion and science, and the synthesis of "Yeshiva" and "University." This concept of synthesis was enunciated by Dr. Bel-

kin in a message he delivered many years ago:

If we seek the blending of science and religion and the integration of secular knowledge into sacred wisdom, then it is not in the subject matter represented by these fields, but rather within the personality of the individual that we hope to achieve the synthesis.

Although one might notice that Harvard is misspelled (p. 18) and perhaps quibble with Dr. Stitskin's translation of the word *chakhmah* (Psalms 111:10 and Proverbs 4:7) as "reason" (p. 3) rather than "wisdom," his essay is a fitting tribute to Dr. Belkin as a scholar and educator.

Dr. Belkin's article in the anthology, entitled "Some Obscure Traditions Mutually Clarified in Philo and Rabbinic Literature," was originally published in the 75th volume of the *Jewish Quarterly Review* (new series 1967). This article discusses passages in Philo and Rabbinic literature which, standing alone, are not sufficiently lucid or intelligible, but when placed side by side do shed light on one another. Nine examples are cited including the horns of the altar, Abraham's name, the bringing of the first fruits, eternal death, and predestination—all illustrating the purport and significance of Philonic and Rabbinic interpretations which are enhanced and only fully understood when integrated.

Rabbi Soloveitchik's scholarly essay "Confrontation" (*TRADITION*, Vol. 6, 1964), speaks of "non-confronted" and "confronted" man.

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The hêdoné-oriented, egocentric person, the beauty-worshipper, committed to the goods of sense and craving exclusively for boundless aesthetic experience, the voluptuary, inventing needs in order to give himself the opportunity of continual gratification, the sybarite, constantly discovering new areas where pleasure is pursued and happiness found and lost, leads a non-confronted existence.

On the other hand, confronted man critically appraises his position *vis-a-vis* his environment and finds his existential experience

too complex to be equated with the simplicity and non-directedness of the natural lifestream. This man was . . . placed in a new existential realm, that of confronted existence.

These two people, non-confronted man and confronted man are exemplified, respectively, according to the *Rav*, by Adam the first, placed in the Garden of Eden to pursue pleasure and enjoy the fruit of the trees without toil (Genesis 2:8), and Adam the second, dislocated by God from his position of naturalness into confronted existence (Genesis 2:15).

Jews, however, are burdened with a double confrontation. As human beings, they share the destiny of Adam in his confrontation with nature; but as members of a covenantal (i.e. Jewish) community which has preserved its identity under the most unfavorable conditions, they confront another faith (i.e. Gentile) community. Single confrontation philosophy, promulgated by "modern" Jews is doomed to failure, states the *Rav*, because it is based upon misconceptions of the nature of the Jewish

faith community.

Rabbi Soloveitchik's second article in this anthology is "The Lonely Man of Faith" (*TRADITION*, Vol. 7, 1965). It is not a discussion of the problem of faith and reason but focuses on the "human life situation in which the man of faith as an individual concrete being, with his cares and hopes, concerns and needs, joys and sad moments, is entangled." The lonely man of faith is lonely but not alone. He is lonely because he is a man of faith, not because he has no friends. The man of faith has been a solitary figure throughout the ages.

Rabbi Soloveitchik gives an in-depth perceptive and learned analysis of the "objective" awareness of this loneliness from the ontological as well as cultural-historical viewpoints. Adam the first, majestic man of dominion and success, and Adam the second, the lonely man of faith, obedience and defeat, are again portrayed to illustrate the dilemma since both are one and the same person. When the man of faith and religion steps into the cultural and secular sphere, "he finds himself lonely, forsaken, misunderstood." The problem seems insoluble.

Stitskin's brief article entitled, "Maimonides's Unbending Opposition to Astrology" (*TRADITION*, Vol. 13, 1972), is an English translation of Maimonides's letter to the Jews of Marseilles in 1194. A critical edition of this "Letter" was published by A. Marx in the *Hebrew Union College Annual* (Vol. 3 pp. 331-358, 1926 and Vol. 4, pp. 493-494, 1927). An English

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translation by Ralph Lerner appeared in 1963 in *Medieval Political Philosophy* (N. Y. Free Press of Glencoe, pp. 227-236) and an analysis of the letter by R. Lerner was published in *History of Religions* (Vol. 8, pp. 143-158, 1968).

Maimonides writes: "Know my masters that no man should believe anything which is not attested by one of these three sanctions: rational proof, as in mathematical sciences; the perception of the senses; or tradition from the prophets and the righteous." Maimonides distinguishes between astrology and astronomy. The latter contains truth and wisdom.

Another brief chapter is Stitskin's translation of most of Gersonides's (Ralbag) "Introduction to the Book of Job." Dr. Stitskin relates Ralbag's notions on theology and providence.

Samuel David Luzzato's *Yesodei Ha-Torah* (Foundations of the Torah) was first published in English translation with commentary by Dr. Noah H. Rosenbloom in 1965 (Y.U. Press). In his ethico-psychological interpretation of Judaism, Luzzato points out that the Torah takes the nature of man into account by giving us precepts such as compassion and fear of retribution designed to offset derisive instincts.

The essay of Dr. Zalman F. Ury, entitled *Salanter's Mussar Movement*, describes Salanter's methods for transforming cognitive knowledge into attitudinal knowledge. Drawing upon Salanter's writings and the works of his disciples, Ury affirms the relevance

of Mussar for modern man and proposes the appointment of *Mashgiach*-type ethics counselors in elementary and secondary schools.

Dr. Alter B. Z. Metzger writes on "Rabbi Kook's Philosophy of Repentance," an English translation of Rabbi Kook's *Oroth Ha-Teshuva* (Y.U. Press 1968). This work is one of the most significant books on religious thought, since its doctrine of penitence underscores the underlying motif of Kook's ethical system. Kook was confident in the ultimate triumph of Torah goodness as reflected especially in man's endless yearning for penitence. The will to repentance, according to Rabbi Kook, is always present within the heart.

The final selection in the anthology is Dr. Sidney B. Hoenig's "The Scholarship of Dr. Bernard Revel" (Y.U. Press 1968) containing a prologue by Dr. Belkin. Hoenig, former dean of the Bernard Revel Graduate School and disciple of the late Dr. Revel, followed in his master's footsteps in both Rabbinic studies and in scholarly research. Hoenig's essay is devoted exclusively to an evaluation of Dr. Revel's scholarly research, and reveals the underlying themes which motivated Dr. Revel's many-faceted intellectual pursuits and his philosophy that secular knowledge in Judaism is not separate from the study of Torah. "He combined Talmudic depth with historic background and academic orientation."

It is unfortunate that large sections of introductory and explanatory material of several of the original versions of the essays are lacking in the anthology, an omission

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certainly necessitated by space limitations. The primary thrust of the volume is to provide contemporary scholars some of the classical works of Jewish sages and philosophers together with a critical ap-

praisal of their writings. The essays in this anthology constitute a veritable mosaic of classical Jewish thought relevant to contemporary scholarship.

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